

RIVERFRONT *Renaissance* MIDDLETOWN, CT

Introduction

"Reclaiming One of the Last Great Places on Earth" was the headline in a recent article in the New York Times describing the City of Middletown's efforts to re-connect with the Connecticut River. These efforts are focused on a compact area adjacent to the river that presents both challenges and great opportunities.

This area:

- Is approximately 100 miles from Boston and New York and has a population of approximately three million people within a one hour drive;
- Contains 85 acres with the potential for great access to the river and the downtown area;
- Has 2,500 feet of frontage along the River;
- Has 3,500 feet of frontage along Route 9; and
- Is adjacent to vibrant residential and commercial neighborhoods.

Complementary Efforts

A number of on-going activities complement the City's efforts to re-invigorate the riverfront:

The Connecticut River has been designated an American Heritage River, increasing the potential for federal funding for various projects;

Connecticut Department of Transportation re-design of Route 9 in this area could result in better access to the River, a more pedestrian-friendly environment, and additional areas for development;

- Federal funding has been made available to determine whether environmental contamination exists in the area and to develop strategies for any clean up;
- Plans are being developed to remove the sewage treatment plant from the riverfront area. This will free up an additional 11 acres of waterfront property.

The purpose of this document is to present a unified vision for this most important area of Middletown.










The Study Area






Major Elements of the Concept Plan

This concept plan brings together a number of elements that are necessary for the riverfront and the downtown to operate as mutually vibrant and attractive areas. These elements are grouped under the thematic headings of, *Land Use*, *Focal Points*, *Circulation*, *Riverfront Activities*, and *Design Themes*. A discussion of the Plan follows.

Land Use

-  Allow commercial uses (with possible second-story office or residential) with the emphasis on pedestrian-scale, waterfront-related uses. Allow cultural and educational uses and performance spaces.
-  Create a medium to high-density market-rate housing neighborhood. Redevelop Maplewood Terrace as part of this new village district.
-  Provide for park/conservation.
-  Allow mixed uses as transition from residential to commercial.
-  Provide for a new Railroad Station/Tourist Center.
-  Provide parking areas along Route 9 ramps.
-  Provide active recreation/park. Allow privately-run kiosks and concessions to support active recreational uses in publicly-owned areas.

Focal Points

-  Provide for a cove/inlet area adjacent to Sumner Brook & the proposed Plaza Area.
-  Use the Plaza Area at the terminus of the Route 17 Boulevard as a gateway to the Riverfront.
-  Use the Railroad Station on Union Street as a linkage between the downtown and the Riverfront.
- Emphasize pedestrian access along Walnut Street to relate the residential neighborhood to the riverfront area.



Circulation

- Remove existing ramps and reconstruct Route 17 to an on-grade boulevard. Use compact ramp system for Route 9 to free up land and minimize the barrier caused by the highway.
- Use Union Street, Walnut Street, and Route 17 corridors as major vehicular, pedestrian, and visual connectors to the riverfront area.
- Re-align River Road at Union Street and south of Walnut Street to provide more usable land area.
- Provide parking areas under and along Route 9 ramps.
- Re-configure Maple Street as a loop road to support residential uses. Provide frontage on proposed boulevard to support business uses.
- Create a grid-system of streets connecting Maplewood Terrace, Omo Street, Walnut Street, and River Road.

Riverfront Activities

- At the terminus of the proposed boulevard, create a relatively expansive plaza capable of accommodating large public gatherings.
- Establish a pedestrian greenway adjacent to the river connecting to other passive open space and active recreation areas.
- Provide pedestrian connections to Harbor Park.
- Provide a fishing pier that also has easy pedestrian access to Harbor Park. Provide a series of boat docks along the river.
- Encourage rehabilitation of the railroad as an extension of the Connecticut Valley Tourist Railroad/Essex Steamtrain excursion.
- Provide facilities for a variety of activities such as picnicking, ice skating, concerts, fairs, craft shows, and farmer's markets.
- Encourage commercial activities that complement active recreation.

Design Themes

- Use streetscape to re-enforce the major elements of the Plan. Elements such as lighting, signage, landscaping, banners, and pavement texture can emphasize the different destinations in the area.
- Scale commercial and residential buildings to complement adjacent development and reflect the current character of the downtown area.
- Site development so as to take advantage of and preserve views to the river.
- Integrate natural areas such as brooks and wetlands into a greenbelt park system.
- Provide for strong visual and physical connections between the river, Downtown, the South Green area, and Wesleyan University.

Underlying Principles

The vision expressed in this plan was not created in a vacuum. It is the product of the people of Middletown who took the time to attend public meetings and express their desires, concerns, and hopes for this special area of the City. The underlying principles, which grew out of the public meetings and which should guide the overall development of the area, are as follows:

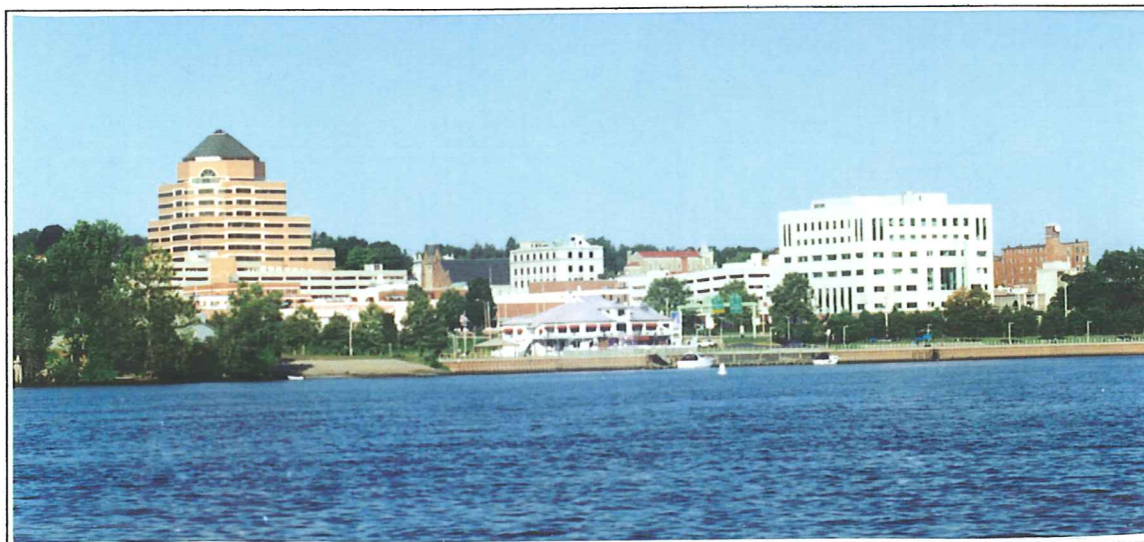
- Keep development at an appropriate scale – complement the adjacent neighborhoods.
- Use circulation patterns, land development, and design elements to strengthen the downtown and the riverfront area.
- Always focus on the River. Assess development proposals on the basis of their impact upon the river and the riverfront area.
- Incorporate pedestrian orientation into street, sidewalk, and building design.
- Provide multiple points of access - pedestrian, vehicular, and visual - to the River.
- Protect and enhance views of the river - work with Portland to provide mutual scenic protections for the riverfront areas.
- Concentrate open space and active recreational uses along the riverfront.
- Establish a significant water-related use such as small marina or a series of docks in the riverfront area.
- Use railroad as an asset - establish a tourist attraction around it.
- Remove sewage treatment plant from area.
- Establish commercial uses that will complement, not take away from, downtown retail.

Next Steps:

- Establish a non-profit Development Corporation to administer the Riverfront Plan.
- Continue exploration of "Brownfield" areas and strategies for remedial action.
- Re-locate sewage treatment plant out of study area.
- Continue to coordinate with the Connecticut Department of Transportation to ensure that the redesign of the Route 9/Route 17 intersection benefits the Riverfront and the Downtown.
- Develop a comprehensive master plan for the area.
- Do a comprehensive re-write of zoning regulations for the study area. Consider design controls as allowed under Connecticut's Village District Act.
- Develop a design theme and a design manual for the study area.
- Actively market this area of Middletown to "jump-start" implementation of the development plan.

For More Information, contact:

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Downtown Middletown